

**Prepared Remarks of FCC Commissioner Mignon L. Clyburn  
At “The Future of the Internet” Public Hearing  
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Thank you, Amalia for that kind introduction and many thanks to Free Press, Main Street Project, and Center for Media Justice for inviting me to participate. I am really happy to be here with you, your great Senator Al Franken, and my good friend and colleague, Commissioner Michael Copps.

Now many of you already know this, but I must reaffirm that the American people have a champion in my colleague, Commissioner Copps. For the last ten years, he has been the consistent voice for consumers at the FCC. He puts people first. He fights for First Amendment values, diversity of ownership, and voices in the communications space. He advocates for an open Internet for the American people.

At the FCC, we follow seniority when we speak, so it is not easy for me because I always have to follow Commissioner Copps. He is so thorough and convincing that it’s hard for me not to just say “I second that!” or “Amen!”, so please indulge me as I find my footing.

With each passing day, the Internet becomes more vital and essential in our lives. Whether it’s finding a job, receiving comprehensive health care, accessing educational materials, news and information, or participating in our democratic society—more Americans rely on the Internet each and every day.

And on that point, there is significant agreement. The President recently said that the Internet is “vital infrastructure” and “has become central to the daily economic life of almost every American.” And the U. S. Congress charged the FCC with developing our National Broadband Plan to ensure that high-speed Internet is available to *all* Americans—no matter where they live, and set aside over \$7 billion in the Recovery Act for grants to build out broadband, and to encourage its adoption and use.

The current success of the Internet is due largely to its open architecture. It is a tremendous “technological leap.” Commissioner Copps has noted, and I agree that the Internet may have as democratizing an effect on society, as the printing press. Never before have media upstarts been able to reach such large audiences, in so short a time.

And if you think I am prone to exaggeration, remember that companies such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter have all been founded since 2003! New and innovative media companies are constantly starting-up today, citizen journalism is on the rise, blogs have an increasing influence on public discourse, and media providers from broadcast networks to newspapers are shifting their strategies online.

For these reasons and more, I say without hesitation, that an open Internet is indeed the great equalizer. It enables traditionally underrepresented groups—like minorities and women—to have an equal voice and an equal opportunity. It allows any

connected individual to distribute their ideas to a global network or run their business right from their very own home.

Just as the printing press dramatically reduced the price of publishing and disseminating works on a large scale, the Internet reduces the barriers to entry for new players. The Internet has become a gateway to success for those in business, and in the media, at a low capital cost.

So for these reasons, I am a firm believer in an open Internet, and I am also a proponent of the Commission enacting rules to ensure an open Internet. But let me be clear, when I say this, I am not talking about government regulating the content on the Internet. This is about consumers—rather than corporations—maintaining control over their online experience. This is about keeping the Internet open for new entrants, small companies, people of all backgrounds and levels of experience and financial resources, including people of color and women.

So while I support the ongoing dialogue and consensus building among interested parties concerning the open Internet, I think that it is important for us to listen to all participants, including consumer groups, organizations representing minorities and women, and others whose futures are dependent on an open Internet.

An FCC study found that a greater percentage of African Americans and Latinos access the internet only through their wireless handsets. So any proposal that treats fixed and mobile Internet access to broadband differently would be problematic for me to support.

Americans who cannot afford wired Internet in addition to wireless Internet should also be guaranteed access to an open Internet. This is really a significant issue when so many businesses and government agencies are moving their information strictly online in order to save money.

Any proposal that favors the FCC being stripped of its rulemaking authority regarding consumer protection and non-discrimination requirements, and any proposal that would advocate that no agency will have authority over Internet access would be impossible for me to embrace and should leave us all wondering, if that should ever happen, exactly who is going to protect Internet consumers?

So while fundamentally I will affirm that there are many issues on which we agree—there are key issues on which it will be harder to find consensus. And on the key issues on which we disagree, I am hopeful that, going forward, we will be able to find ways to express ourselves and our divergent points of views, in a manner that embraces and encourages civility in an atmosphere of spirited discourse.

The American people deserve a decision that has had the benefit of a healthy debate, and one that is grounded in the facts, law, and a sound analysis. I know a healthy debate on the merits is possible. We have had them on many other policy issues. I have high hopes that, in the policy debate about preserving open Internet principles, all sides

will spend less time on the rhetoric and spend more time on the facts and law and the results for consumers.

I tell my staff often that it is important for us to get outside the Beltway and hear directly from consumers. I want to thank you and the participants on tonight's panel for taking time out of your busy lives to attend tonight's discussion. I look forward to hearing about what an open Internet means to you.